Jesus and Dionysus in "The Acts Of The Apostles" and early Christianity

Author(s): John Moles

Source: *Hermathena*, Summer 2006, No. 180 (Summer 2006), pp. 65-104

Published by: Trinity College Dublin

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.com/stable/23041662

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at https://about.jstor.org/terms

Trinity College Dublin is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Hermathena*

JSTOR

This content downloaded from 63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Jesus and Dionysus in *The Acts Of The Apostles* and early Christianity[1]

by John Moles

Does *Acts* quote *Bacchae*? Is *Acts* influenced by Dionysiac myth or ritual? These old questions, currently resurgent, remain acute.[2] If – as is still disputed – the answers are affirmative, what are the consequences? I argue a maximalist case.

I THE EVIDENCE

(A) *Broad* thematic parallels between *Acts* and *Bacchae*

These include:

(A1) disruptive impact of 'new' god

(A2) (series of) judicial proceedings against 'new' god and his followers

(A3) 'bondage' of 'new' god or his followers

(A4) (series of) imprisonment(s) of 'new' god's followers

(A5) their generally miraculous escapes from prison

(A6) divine epiphany/ies (sometimes associated with (A4-5), sometimes not)

---

[1] Oral versions were given, during 2004-6, at Newcastle, Durham, Dublin, Tallahassee, Princeton, Columbia, Charlottesville and Yale. For much help (and, in some cases, wonderful hospitality), I thank: Loveday Alexander, John Barclay, Stephen Barton, Kai Brodersen, John Dillon, Jimmy Dunn, Sean Freyne, John Garthwaite, Albert Henrichs, Liz Irwin, Chris Kraus, Manfred Lang, Brian McGing, John Marincola, Damien Nelis, Susanna Phillippo, Richard Seaford, Rowland Smith, Tony Spawforth, Mike Tueller and Tony Woodman. Translations and errors are mine, presentation and documentation minimalist.

[2] E.g. Nestle (1900); Smend (1925); Fiebig (1926); Rudberg (1926); Weinreich (1929) ; Windisch (1932); Voegeli (1953); Dibelius (1956) 190; Hackett (1956); Funke (1967); Conzelmann (1972) 49; Colaclides (1973); Pervo (1987) 21-2; Tueller (1992); Brenk (1994); Rapske (1994) 412-19; Seaford (1996) 53; (1997); (2006) ch. 9; Fitzmyer (1998) 341; Dormeyer-Galindo (2003) 49 ff.; 95; 365; Hintermaier (2003); Lang (2003); (2004); Weaver (2004); Dormeyer (2005).

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

(A7) warning that persecution of 'new' god/'new' god's followers is 'fighting against god'

(A8) direct warning by unrecognised 'new' god to persecutor

(A9) 'fighting against god' by 'new' god's persecutor(s)

(A10) 'mockery' of 'new' god or his followers

(A11) general human-divine conflict

(A12) kingly persecutor(s)

(A13) kingly persecutor arrogates divinity to himself

(A14) divine destruction of impious kingly persecutor(s)

(A15) rejection of 'new' god by his own, whom he severely punishes

(A16) destruction of palace/destruction of Jerusalem and Temple

(A17) adhesion of women to 'new' religion

(A18) Dionysiac 'bullishness'.

While some of these parallels need justification, the two texts clearly share numerous important themes. From this perspective alone, the hypothesis that *Bacchae* influenced *Acts* is not implausible.

(B) *Detailed* thematic parallels between *Acts* and *Bacchae*
There are three crucial cases:[3]

(B1) The three accounts of Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus (9.3-9, 22.6-11, 26.12-18) ~ *Bacchae* 576-641 (the epiphany of Dionysus and his escape from prison).

There are the following common elements: (i) light and lightning (the latter explicit at 9.3 and 22.6); (ii) people falling to the ground; (iii) invisible divine voice; (iv) divine voice addressing people by name; (v) people asking a question; (vi)

[3] See esp. Seaford (1997).

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

god identifying himself; (vii) divine command to stand up from the ground; (viii) seeing the god; (ix) conversion or reaffirmation of original conversion (Saul, the chorus in *Bacchae*) or non-conversion (Pentheus).

(B2) Herod Agrippa I's persecution of the Christians, his attempt to kill Peter and Peter's miraculous escape from prison (12.1-10) also ~ *Bacchae* 576-641.

There are the following common elements: (i) ruthlessly persecuting king; (ii) imprisoned followers of the god; (iii) emphasis on the strength of the imprisonment; (iv) emphasis on the suddenness of the supernatural intervention; (v) divine light; (vi) divine instruction to stand up; (vii) confusion between vision and reality; (viii) miraculous, 'automatic' opening of the gate. Beyond the immediate sequences, the two narratives also have (ix) the death of the persecuting king.

(B3) The miraculous deliverance of Paul and Silas from prison and the conversion of the gaoler (16.23-30) also ~ *Bacchae* 576-641.

There are the following common elements: (i) prayer by the god's followers; (ii) suddenness of the divine epiphany; (iii) earthquake; (iv) collapse of building; (v) miraculous release of prisoner's bonds and of doors; (vi) surprise and confusion of gaoler figure (the functionary in *Acts*, Pentheus in *Bacchae*); (vii) transition from darkness to light; (viii) gaoler figure's drawing his sword; (ix) gaoler figure's rushing into the interior; (x) gaoler figure's falling to the ground; (xi) conversion or reaffirmation of original conversion (the functionary in *Acts*, the chorus in *Bacchae*) or non-conversion (Pentheus); (xii) escaper's claim that he has not run away; (xiii) focus on the final religious response of the gaoler figure: since he has not actually lost his prisoner, will he accept the divine warning (the gaoler in *Acts*) or reject it (Pentheus)?

New Testament scholars, however, characteristically invoke Jewish material.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

With *2 Maccabees 3*,[4] where a divine epiphany prevents Heliodorus, officer of the Syrian king Seleucus, from plundering the Temple, the common elements are: (i) resplendence; (ii) person falling to the ground; (iii) darkness; (iv) person needing physical help from attendants; (v) conversion/religious transformation.

With *Joseph and Aseneth* 14.2-8 (on the conversion of Aseneth after a heavenly vision)[5] the common elements are: (i) heavenly light; (ii) human falling to the ground; (iii) divine figure (not actually the god) addressing human by name; (iv) human asking identity of divine figure; (v) divine figure identifying himself; (vi) divine figure telling human to stand up; (vii) conversion of human; (viii) divine instructions.

With *Ezekiel* 1.28-2.1 the common elements are: (i) heavenly light; (ii) human falling to the ground; (iii) god telling human to stand up; (iv) god giving human instructions; and with *Daniel* 10.5-11[6] the common elements are: (i) lightning (mentioned in a comparison); (ii) human falling to ground; (iii) angel addressing human by name; (iv) angel telling human to stand up; (v) angel giving instructions.

Also cited are such 'call of the prophet stories' as *Isaiah* 6.1-13 and *Jeremiah* 1.4-10.[7]

Rarely cited is *1 Samuel* 26.17-18:[8] 'Saul recognized David's voice and asked, "David, is that you, my son?" "Yes, your Majesty," David answered. And he added, "Why, sir, are you still pursuing me, your servant?".

How to arbitrate? *1 Samuel* 26.17-18, clearly important, concerns only one element in a complicated sequence. The 'call of prophets' narratives produce only very general parallels. The most substantial Jewish parallels are *2 Maccabees* 3 and *Joseph and Aseneth* 14.2-8,[9] but the former contains some very discrepant elements, and the *Bacchae* passage produces more parallels than *2 Maccabees* 3 and better parallels than both *2*

[4] Wright (2003) 390 ff.; Barrett (2004) 441.
[5] Wright (2003) 392; Barrett (2004) 441.
[6] Wright (2003) 392.
[7] Barrett (2004) 442.
[8] Haacker (2003) 32 n. 9.
[9] Neither, probably, free of non-Jewish influences: 2 *Maccabees* seems to have 'Dionysiac' elements (p. 80 below), and some scholars regard *Joseph and Aseneth* (of very uncertain date) as Christian-influenced.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Maccabees 3 and *Joseph and Aseneth* (for example, the divine figure is the god himself, not his representative, and the light is lightning). Further, the Jewish material scarcely illuminates the narratives of Peter and of Paul and Silas, in relation to both of which, especially the latter, the *Bacchae* parallel is extremely strong. Moreover, all three narratives are thematically interrelated, and the parallels between Peter's and Paul's releases and the release of Dionysus in *Bacchae* were already noted by the Christian apologist Origen in ca. 249 CE (*Contra Celsum* 2.34).

I conclude that, while there is some Jewish input into these narratives, the *Bacchae* parallel is far stronger. But what does it mean? Luke demonstrably uses *Bacchae* elsewhere in *Acts*, so *Bacchae* 576-641 may some provided some inspiration here as well, particularly in relation to 26.12-18 (cf. (C) below, esp. (C7)). But it seems unlikely that the three narratives were inspired by a single Euripidean passage or by any single intermediate source, now lost. Rather, there is a more general appeal to the patterns of initiation into Dionysiac cult that underlie *Bacchae* 576-641[10] and to prose works – such as the novel – that incorporate such Dionysiac patterns into their narratives.[11]

(C) *Verbal* parallels between *Acts* and *Bacchae*

Acts	*Bacchae*
(C1) 5.39 'lest you be found *godfighters* [θεομάχοι]'. [The Sanhedrin has arrested Peter and other Apostles. The Pharisee Gamaliel argues for their release, on the ground that time will tell whether their movement comes from man or God. If the former, its falsity will soon be exposed; if the	45 'who *fights against god* in the matters regarding me'. [Dionysus in criticism of Pentheus, who rejects Dionysus' cult]; cf. also 325 'and I won't *fight against god* persuaded by your words' [Teiresias to Pentheus]; 540-4 'Pentheus ... who *fights against the gods*' [chorus]; 635-6 'for,

[10] Discussion: Seaford (1996) 195-202.

[11] Novelistic appropriation of 'mystery religion' elements: Pervo (1987) 21-2; Heever (2005); *Acts* ~ the novel: Pervo (1987).

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

latter, 'you will not be able to undo them, lest you be found godfighters', i.e. you will then be punished for impiousness.]	being a man, he dared to come to *a fight against a god*' [Dionysus on Pentheus]; 788 'suffering badly at your hands, nevertheless I say that you must not *raise up arms against a god*' [disguised Dionysus warning Pentheus]; 1255-6 'but that man is able only to *fight against god*' [Agave on Pentheus].
(C2) 9.1 'Saul, still *breathing* threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord'	620 '[Pentheus] *breathing* out his passion'
(C3) 12.7 'and the chains fell off their hands', 12.10 '[the iron gate the one that bore toward the city] opened for them *all by itself*', of Peter and his companions' miraculous escape from prison Cf. 5.19 'an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors' (of the second imprisonment of Peter and the Apostles) and 16.26 'and immediately all the doors were opened and the bonds of all were undone' (of the miraculous freeing of Paul and Silas and the other prisoners at Philippi)	447-8 '*all by themselves* the chains were undone from their feet, and the bolts loosed the doors without mortal hand', of the miraculous escape of the imprisoned Bacchants.
(C4) 17.18-21...-32 [Paul in Athens] 'others said, "he seems to be an announcer of *strange* [ξένων] *deities*." (For he was reporting the good news about Jesus and the Rising.) And they took hold of him and led him to the Areopagos, saying:	216 'I hear of the *new* evils in this city'; 219-20 '*the new deity* Dionysus'; 247 'whoever the *stranger* is' [of the disguised Dionysus]; 256 '*introducing this new god* to men' [all spoken by Pentheus]; 272 '*this "new" god*, whom you *mock*';

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

"May we know what this *new* teaching is which is spoken by you? For you are introducing to our ears certain *strange* [ξενίζοντα] things. So we want to know what these things mean". For all the Athenians and the *strangers* [ξένοι] that were staying there spent their time on nothing other than saying or hearing some *rather new* thing ... But when they heard the rising of corpses, some *mocked* ...'	cf. 467; epithet '*stranger*' repeatedly applied to disguised Dionysus. Cf. also Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.1.1 'Socrates acts unjustly, not believing in the gods that the city believes in but *introducing* other and *new* deities'; similarly Plato, *Apology* 24b-c.
(C5) 17.27-9 [Paul to the Athenians] "to seek the Lord ... who is indeed not far from each one of us. For in him *we live and move and are*, as actually some of your poets have said: for we are his offspring."	506 [Dionysus disguised as the stranger to Pentheus] 'you do not know *what you are living, nor what you are doing, nor who you are*.'
(C6) 17.34 'certain men joined him and believed, among whom was *Dionysios* the Areopagite and a woman by name *Heifer* [Damaris] and others with them' (of Paul's converts in Athens)	2 'Dionysos' (name constantly recurs), 100 (Dionysos as bull), many other 'bullish' allusions
(C7) 26.14 'it is hard for you to kick against the pricks' [Jesus to Saul in the third telling of Paul's conversion]	794-5 'I would sacrifice to him rather than become angry and kick against the pricks, a mortal against a god' [Dionysus in disguise advising Pentheus]

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Of these parallels, (C1), (C3) and (C7) are commonly cited; (C5) is due to Colaclides;[12] and (C2), (C4) and (C6) are, so far as I know, original suggestions. Some other suggestions occasionally made I have tacitly discounted.

These are, indeed, 'objective' verbal parallels, but are they accidental or 'real' (in the sense that they do things)?[13]

While the thought of (C1) is perfectly Jewish, it is also a common Greek religious concept, it is a *Leitmotiv* of *Bacchae*, the Greek compound 'fight against G/god' (and cognates) is distinctive, it is found only here in the New Testament,[14] and the item fulfils the same narrative and theological function in *Acts* and in *Bacchae*: that of the 'wise warning' disregarded by persecutors.[15] (Gamaliel's audience obeys here, but not later.) Interestingly, scholars debate the historicity of Gamaliel's intervention (certainly, some of his arguments are anachronistic).[16]

(C2) is in itself a slight verbal parallel, but its force depends on a larger question: whether Saul can be shown to 'play a Pentheus role' in the narrative.[17]

The specific parallel between 'all by itself' and 'all by themselves' hardly establishes (C3) as a significant verbal parallel, but in Classical texts such descriptions *are* associated with Dionysiac epiphanies.[18]

In (C4), Luke is casting Paul as Socrates, as the Platonic and Xenophontic parallels show.[19] But in Plato and Xenophon Socrates is accused of introducing not 'strange' deities, but 'new' ones, and Luke emphasises the notion of 'strangeness' three times. For its part, *Bacchae* represents Dionysus both as 'new' and as 'strange'. Further, *Bacchae* (date: ca. 405) sometimes creates the anachronistic impression of treating the accusation

---

[12] Colaclides (1973).

[13] In the first instance, at any rate, the question should not be framed in terms of Luke's 'consciousness' or 'intention'.

[14] *Acts*' adroit deployment of *hapax* material merits a study in itself.

[15] Similarly Versnel (1990) 199; Tueller (1992) 36; Dormeyer-Galindo (2003) 95; Lang (2003) 7f.

[16] Haenchen (1971) 256-58; Lüdemann (1989) 70-3; Barrett (2004) 282, 292-8.

[17] P. 76 below; also relevant is Luke's intertextual engagement with 2 *Maccabees*: p. 81 below.

[18] Weinreich (1929) 309 ff.

[19] I discuss *Acts*' engagement with pagan philosophy in Moles (2006) and flag here only the most important elements.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

made against Socrates (date: 399). This is because Euripides invests the introduction of Dionysus cult into heroic-age Greece with the anxiety response to new cults characteristic of late fifth-century Athens, a response which, historically, crystallised against Socrates.[20] *Acts* 17 also contains the *Bacchae* theme of 'mockery' of the 'new' god (*Bacchae* 272). Luke's use of 'strange deities', therefore, combines an allusion to Plato and Xenophon with an allusion to *Bacchae*: he has seen, and is exploiting, this anachronistic conceptual relationship between the two apparently different types of material. The double literary allusion is deft and ingenious.[21]

(C5) is complicated. As commentators note, 'we are his offspring' is a quotation from the not in fact Athenian poet Aratus (*Phaenomena* 5), with an allusion also to the (poetic) *Hymn to Zeus* (line 4) of the Stoic philosopher Cleanthes, also not Athenian but at least Athenian by residence. But, as commentators also note, 'as actually some of your poets have said' could refer backwards as well as forwards or could indeed look both ways. 'Your' in what sense? Merely non-Jewish? That fits the allusions to Aratus and Cleanthes. But Paul is directly addressing the 'men of Athens' (17.22). Might then 'some of your poets' also gloss the Athenian Euripides and 'in him we live and move and are' also allude directly to *Bacchae* 506?[22] *Bacchae* is already in the air ((C4)). The contexts are similar. Paul is arguing that the Athenians are ignorant and do not realise the proximity of the one true god. Equally, Pentheus does not realise that Dionysus is 'near' (500) and the 'stranger' (Dionysus himself) upbraids Pentheus' ignorance. 'In him we live and move and are' represents the polar opposite of Pentheus' ignorance. This reconstruction attributes dense literary allusion, sliding phraseology and decidedly fancy footwork to Luke:[23]

---

[20] Cf. e.g. Dodds (1960) xxiv-v; Versnel (1990) 173-5; Seaford (1996) 51.

[21] And rather in the manner of Persse McGarrigle's nicely provocative thesis concerning 'the influence of T.S. Eliot on Shakespeare', in David Lodge's international campus novel, *Small World*.

[22] The traditional view that there is an allusion to the Cretan Epimenides (Bruce (1951) 338) is rejected by Colaclides (1973) 161f., but it hardly matters: the more allusions, the merrier!

[23] Also of course to the dramatic Paul, who comprehensively outwits his stuck-up Epicurean and Stoic philosophical opponents and who is the real 'poet' here: Moles (2006).

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

exactly as in (C4). The two items go together and are mutually reinforcing.

In (C6), Dionysios is a common Greek name and so is Damalis, but the unparalleled form Damaris[24] is arresting, and the names mean 'Dionysiac' and 'Heifer', and thus explicitly allude not only to Dionysus but to Dionysus *qua* bull god. Furthermore, even if Dionysios and Damaris are historical figures,[25] there is some historical distortion here, since they were not converted on this occasion.[26] As with the Gamaliel warning, a Dionysiac allusion has been purchased by historical distortion.

(C7) is a Greek proverb, but, like (C1), it *is* Greek, it is not in fact a common proverb, it *is* used in tragedy,[27] it *is* used in *Bacchae*, this is its only occurrence in the New Testament, and the situation is exactly the same both in *Bacchae* and in *Acts*: the persecuted and unrecognised god uses the proverb in direct exhortation of his chief persecutor.

As individual parallels, (C1), (C4), (C5), (C6) and (C7) are all strong. The cumulative effect, particularly the concentration in *Acts* 17, is also compelling. Thus in my view the verbal parallels prove use of *Bacchae* and of more general Dionysiac material.

(D) Other Dionysiac material

A fairly obvious case is the second arrest and imprisonment of the Apostles (5.19-25),[28] which comes within the sequence that begins at 4.1 ff. (the arrest and examination of Peter and John) and that culminates in Gamaliel's warning at 5.39. The miraculous release of the Apostles by an angel of the Lord belongs to the same narrative pattern as 12.1-10 and 16.26-30 ((B2) and (B3) above). Indeed, 5.19-25 functions as a 'prequel' of Peter's more elaborate Dionysiac escape in 12.1-10.[29] One detail, the emphasis on the guards' discomfiture at the Apostles'

[24] Bruce (1951) 341.

[25] Discussion: Lüdemann (1989) 193-4; Barrett (2004) 855; I think they are fictional (n. 91).

[26] Not being among the 'first fruits of Achaea' (*1 Cor.* 16.15; Lüdemann (1989) 194).

[27] Aes. *Ag.* 1624; *PV* 323; E. *IT* 1395f.

[28] Dormeyer-Galindo (2003) 95.

[29] Wallace-Williams (1993) 58; Dunn (1996) 67-8.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

standing *outside* when they had been *im*prisoned, corresponds to *Bacchae* 644-6.[30]

Another possibility is the Pentecost episode,[31] where (2.13) the Apostles' glossolalia – enabling the widest international outreach – prompts the mocking 'they are filled with sweet wine'. 'Sweet' wine implies 'new' wine and commentators devise various expedients to explain the difficulty that new wine is not drunk at Pentecost, but Wallace and Williams sensibly infer: 'the phrase is a proverbial allusion to widespread drunkenness when the year's new wine first becomes drinkable'.[32] Peter denies the charge (15): 'these men are not drunk, as you take it, for it is the third hour of the day'.

Now, drunkenness is a feature of Dionysiac wine festivals such as the Anthesteria, Dionysiacs got drunk at night, they were divinely possessed, forms of glossolalia featured in pagan cult,[33] Dionysus cult was the most international of pagan cults, Pentheus accuses the Bacchanals of drunkenness and mocks the new god, but the charge of drunkenness is denied by the Messenger,[34] and the *Acts* narrative opposes the mockery with an idealised description of the Christian life at 2.42 and 44-46, which includes 'the breaking of bread'. While scholars dispute whether in *Acts* 'the breaking of bread' refers to, or includes, the Eucharist,[35] given that *Acts* 2.42, 27.35, etc. ~ *Luke* 22.19 ~ 24.30, the allusion must at least be *included*, so that, although *Acts* does not specify wine-drinking at such meals,[36] a broad contrast remains between what is misapprehended as Dionysiac excess (2.13) and Christian table-fellowship.

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit, with which the Apostles are actually 'filled' (2.4) is imaged (*inter alia*) as a liquid (2.17-18, 33: 'I will pour out from my spirit'), as already implied in the prophecy of the risen Jesus at 1.5: 'John baptised in water, but after not many days you will be baptised in holy spirit'. The

---

[30] Tueller (1992) 33.

[31] Johnson (1992) 44; Tueller (1992) 34; Dormeyer-Galindo (2003) 46, 50, 53.

[32] Wallace-Williams (1993) 36.

[33] Tschiedel (1975); *1 Cor.* 14.22-23.

[34] *Ba.* 221-2, 686-8, with Tueller (1992) 33.

[35] Also 20.7, 11; 27.35; cf. e.g. Bruce (1951) 100, 465; Wallace-Williams (1993) 36; Dunn (1996) 268, 341; Dormeyer-Galindo (2003) 59; Barrett (2004) 164-5; 950-1; 1208-10; II.xcii-iii.

[36] On the motive see p. 80 below.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

function of the incorrect accusation of 2.13, therefore, is to imply a contrast between the 'bad' Dionysus of pagan religion and the 'good' Jesus who is the true wine. Moreover, since the Apostles are figured as drinking the equivalent of the true, *new* wine, the Pentecost episode looks back to three passages in Luke's former book, the Gospel (*Acts* 1.1). The first is the institution of the Lord's Supper (*Luke* 19-20): 'And having taken bread and having given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying: "This is my body which is given for you. Do this with a view to my remembrance". And the cup similarly after eating, saying: "This *cup* which is *poured out* for you is the *new* covenant in my blood" '. The second is at 7.32, when Jesus, notorious as a wine-drinker, contrasts his own lifestyle with the Baptist's ascetic lifestyle: 'we piped to you and you did not dance', in apparent allusion to the devotees of Pan and Dionysus.[37] The third passage, at 5.33-38, also concerns the difference between John and Jesus: '(36) He also said a parable to them: "No one having torn a piece from a new garment puts it upon an old garment; otherwise, he will tear the new one and also the piece from the new one will not match the old. (37) And no one puts *new wine* into old wineskins; otherwise, the new wine will break the wineskins and it itself will be *poured out* and the skins will be destroyed. (38) But *new wine* must be put into new wineskins".' This passage combines defence of the seemingly laxer behaviour of Jesus and his disciples with positive celebration of 'newness'.[38]

So the Pentecost narrative belongs within a complicated sequence – which extends back through *Acts* 1 and into the *Gospel* – concerned with the relationship, within first-century Judaism, Jesus' ministry, and early Christianity, between the old and the new, between Jesus and the Baptist, and between Jesus and wine, and within that sequence Dionysus plays an important role both of comparison and of contrast.

---

[37] Freyne (2000) 271-86; (2004) 56; cf. also *Matthew* 11.17.

[38] Cf. also *Matthew* 9.14-15; *Mark* 2.18-20; discussion: Dunn (2003a) 441-2; *Luke* 5.39 ('and no one having drunk old wine wants new; for he says: "the old is good"'), unparalleled in *Matthew* or *Mark*, is widely dismissed as a softening gloss.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Overall Conclusion

The case for Luke's using both *Bacchae* and narrative patterns derived from Dionysiac myth or ritual is decisive. The following discussion assumes this conclusion but itself provides further evidence.

II CONSEQUENCES

I begin with *basic* consequences and work upwards.

Luke's culture is further illuminated (he knows *Bacchae* and about Dionysiac myth and ritual; he is sophisticated in a Hellenising sense). He expects reciprocal sophistication from at least a proportion of his readership/audience.[39] Origen's response justifies that expectation.[40] Within this sophisticated environment, *Bacchae* was an enduringly popular Greek tragedy, and it had already been exploited by Hellenistic Jewish writers as a way of exploring the relationships between Judaism and Dionysus religion and between religion and politics, and by Stoic and Cynic philosophers in philosophical/political contexts, and Luke knew about both these groups.[41] None of this is to *restrict Acts*' audience/readership to the sophisticated.[42]

Generically, the allusions to *Bacchae* and to Dionysiac myth and ritual bring new strands to *Acts*' highly varied literary texture. Within *Acts*' *primary* generic classification of historiography, tragedy is fully at home.[43] So, at least within *some* types of historiography (notably Herodotean) is myth.[44] Equally, tragedy goes well with *Acts*' Homeric material.[45]

---

[39] Audience/readership of *Acts*, much disputed, can only be constructed from the text. As will emerge, I favour a considerable range. Although I believe that *Acts* is best 'received' as a reading text and some of my interpretations seem better suited to that context, in order to minimise controversy, I make no practical distinction between audience and readership.

[40] Further, Dormeyer (2005) 167-70.

[41] See 2 and 3 *Maccabees* (p. 80 below); Hor. *Epi.* 1.16.73-9 with Moles (2002) 152-5; Epict. 1.1.22-4; 29.5-8 (Cynicising Stoic); Lucn. *Ind.* 19 (Demetrius the Cynic); Luke and philosophy: n. 19 above.

[42] See n. 142 below.

[43] Cf. e.g. Saïd (2002).

[44] Cf. e.g. Boedeker (2002).

[45] Rutherford (1982); Homer in *Acts*: MacDonald (2003).

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

The Dionysiac parallels highlight key elements of the narrative and of the earlier Jesus narrative, frequently recalled: the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus, the Pentecost event, the repeated trials (literal and figurative) of Jesus' followers, the Apostles' first escape from prison, the relative liberalism of Pharisees compared with Sadducees, Paul's conversion, the escapes from prison of Peter and of Paul and Silas, and the first converts from a rival religious movement.[46]

The main events of *Acts* are enacted against the template of *Bacchae*.[47] The Pentecost narrative and the second arrest and imprisonment of the Apostles set the scene. Gamaliel plays the wise warner, like Teiresias. The quotation from *Bacchae* functions as a 'signal' to the sophisticated reader. Gamaliel's warning deters the high priest and the Sadducees only temporarily. Structurally, his warning looks backwards, as well as forwards, colouring the miraculous escape narrative of 5.19-25 and the start of that sequence, 4.1, when the Apostles are first arrested and imprisoned. Indeed, the warning connects thematically as far back as *Acts*' opening words and implicates us as readers/audience.[48] Luke's addressee, *Theophilus* (*Luke* 1.3, *Acts* 1.1), has a doubly significant name: loved by God, we must love God.[49] We must be, as it were, '*theophiles*', not '*theomachs*'. And, given its emphatic placing near the beginning of the narrative, Gamaliel's warning seems to apply, poetically speaking, even to those who did not actually hear it. It is thus *structural* both within *Acts* and, as it were, *outside Acts*.

Stephen's arrest and death re-enact Jesus' (7.60 ~ *Luke* 23.34). Systematic persecution is inaugurated by Saul, complicit in Stephen's death, imprisoner of both men and women (8.1-3), 'still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord' and undertaking to bring those of the Way, whether men or women, in bonds to Jerusalem (9.1-2). Saul plays Pentheus,[50] and the triple emphasis on his murderous 'breathing' (contrasting with the Holy Spirit or 'Breath'), on 'women' and 'bonds' further evokes *Bacchae*. Throughout, *Acts*, like *Bacchae*,

[46] The last item anticipates pp. 83ff. below.
[47] Lang (2003) 7 ff.
[48] Cf. Lang (2003) 9.
[49] Discussion: Barrett (2004) 65-6; Theophilus' historicity is here immaterial.
[50] Voegeli (1953) 418; Lang (2003) 8 ff.; Dormeyer (2005) 166.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

stresses the adhesion of women to the new religious movement. But on the Road to Damascus Saul, unlike Pentheus in *Bacchae* 576-641, acknowledges the divine epiphany. And the third version of the conversion adds psychological depth to Paul's character (26.14). In *Bacchae*, the use of the proverb is doubly 'pointed', first because the pricks are being administered by the bull (Dionysus); second, because, as is well recognised, Pentheus is himself secretly attracted by bullish things,[51] so Dionysus the bull who is doing the pricking is in effect saying: give in to your own bullish prickings. Pentheus (on this occasion) does not; Paul does. Luke's evocation of Euripides' use of the proverb suggests something crucial about the psychology of Saul the persecutor, as, no doubt, about the psychology of many persecutors. The message is both spiritually uplifting and practical: even some of the harshest persecutors can be converted. And Jesus' mercy – so different from Dionysus' implacability – is such that the conversion of the vengeful and hybristic king-figure to the humble servant of God – of the persecutor to the sectator, is in one sense a very small and easy change, a matter, almost, only of the change of a syllable. *Saoul* becomes *Paulus*, the *little* man who does *big* things among both *great* and *small*.[52]

Luke's subsequent elaborate detailing of Paul's physical blindness, his vision of Ananias, his new insight into his role, and his restoration to physical sight (9.8-18) can hardly fail to evoke both Pentheus, sighted but religiously blind, and Teiresias, the blind seer.

From being chief persecutor, Saul now becomes persecutee, at the hands of the Jews (9.23 ff.), and the persecutor role is assumed by Herod Agrippa I, like Pentheus in that he is a persecuting king, and the next bad king in *Luke-Acts*' sequence

[51] Cf. e.g. Dodds (1960) 172-3; Seaford (1996) 213.

[52] Scholars debate (Bruce (1951) 257; Wallace-Williams (1993) 26, 62; Barrett (2004) 609, 616) why at 13.9 Luke switches permanently (except for the transliterated Hebrew *Saoul* at 22.7 and 26.14) from *Saulos* to *Paulos*. But both in the OT and NT name changes can symbolise spiritual change; *Acts* is full of name-plays, including Roman ones; and the pun on 'Paulus' is virtually explicit at 26.22, 24. Thus *Acts* 13 stages a contest between different sorts of power: Paul is a 'small' person doing a 'big' thing, hence the 'strickenness' of his 'powerful' and 'intelligent' Roman name-sake, the proconsul Sergius *Paulus*.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

of bad kings.[53] As the narrative focus reverts to Peter, he also faces a 'god-fighting' moment: the vision at Joppa and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Gentiles, and he decides: 'who was I that I had the power to *hinder God*?' (11.17). Thus the *Bacchae* template reinforces *Acts*' many parallels between Peter and Paul. Herod, again Pentheus-like, imprisons Peter as the leader of the new movement (12.1 ff.). Peter's miraculous escape from bondage and prison parallels the stranger's/Dionysus' escape in the *Bacchae*, and Herod, further like Pentheus in his impious aspiration to divinity, [54] is, like Pentheus, appropriately struck down by divine agency (12.20-23). Paul and Silas' miraculous escape from prison again re-enacts the stranger's/Dionysus' escape in the *Bacchae* and shows another persecutor – the gaoler – making the right choice of acceptance of the divine manifestation. Like the Road to Damascus narrative, all these 'miraculous-escape-from-prison' narratives show Dionysiac parallels providing a language and grammar for the description, in, as it were, an 'international' context, of the phenomena of divine epiphany and conversion or non-conversion. These narratives also imply a kind of religious liberation theology[55] more powerful than any worldly powers, whether Jewish or Roman.[56]

Subsequent trials – or their equivalents – help to keep the *Bacchae* parallel in play, and the parallel is strongly re-activated in *Acts* 17,[57] with its direct use of *Bacchae* motifs, its ambiguous allusion to 'your poets', and its explicit mention of 'Dionysios', and in the third telling of Paul's conversion, where the quotation from *Bacchae* (26.14) confirms the reader in reading that narrative in Dionysiac terms.[58] Clearly, the five pointers to *Bacchae* (5.39, 9.1, 17.28, 17.34, 26.14) are strategically distributed across the narrative. At the end of *Acts*, Paul is again under guard (28.16). Although the *Bacchae* template again

[53] Cf. *Luke* 3.19-20, 9.7-9, 23.7-12; n. 114; p. 89.
[54] *Bacchae* 318-21.
[55] Weaver (2004).
[56] Further pp. 80-81 and 95-6 below.
[57] Whether or not *Acts* 17 describes a formal trial does not matter here: the proceedings are trial-*like*.
[58] Similarly Dormeyer (2005) 166-7.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

comes into play, interpretation of the end requires separate treatment.[59]

The Dionysiac parallels also create more general theological implications. The risen Jesus in *Acts* is a divine figure, and the miraculous releases from prison and the incident on the Road to Damascus prove this status, just as the corresponding events in the *Bacchae* prove Dionysus' divinity.[60] Like Dionysus, most epiphanic of pagan gods, the risen Jesus is epiphanic, and, again like Dionysus, Jesus is a divinity of tremendous physical powers. His followers and agents also have tremendous powers, partly in the healing of the sick, but partly also in the summary administration of justice. If the first category clearly imitates Jesus, the second *seems* more like Dionysus.[61] Jesus' disciples are to be feared. But in fact the same is true of Jesus himself. Like Dionysus, Jesus is a divinity who confronts people with the *choice* of *conversion*. To those who accept him, Jesus brings salvation,[62] just as Dionysus was *the* great pagan 'saviour' god. But, given that *Acts* post-dates the destruction of the Temple and the sacking of Jerusalem,[63] Jesus is also like Dionysus in that he wreaks terrible vengeance on those who do not accept him, especially – history teaches – on his own people.[64] Dionysus also destroyed a palace, Jesus the Temple, since God does not inhabit temples made by hand.[65] As for worship, Dionysiac worship could take the form of a 'mystery', and, in whatever form, wine-drinking was important. So also for Jesus and his followers in *Luke*, and in *Acts* the descriptions of the Apostles at Pentecost and of the breaking of bread by Paul and his companions in Troas (20.7-12) characterise Christianity in somewhat similar terms,[66] though *Acts*, while pre-supposing such wine-drinking,

---

[59] P. 86.

[60] Pervo (1987) 21-2.

[61] 5.5, 10 (of Ananias and Sapphira before Peter); 8.24 (Simon the Magus' fear of Peter); 12.23 (the angel's 'smiting' of Herod Agrippa I); 13.9-12 (Paul's blinding of Bar-Jesus); cf. Tueller (1992) 11 and Gamaliel's warning at 5.35, 38-9.

[62] 2.21, 41, 47; 4.12; 13.23, 26, 47; 16.30-1; 28.28.

[63] N. 106 below.

[64] The vexed question of whether *Acts* is anti-Jewish (loosely, 'anti-Semitic') exceeds my brief.

[65] 17.24 > 7.48, 6.13-14.

[66] Cf. Dormeyer-Galindo (2003) 308.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

leaves it unspecified, no doubt as one way of creating distance between Dionysus religion and Christianity.[67]

But, if the risen Jesus is a divine figure, during his earthly life he was also a human being, a point emphasised in *Acts*,[68] as in *Luke*. Again, the Dionysus parallel speaks, for, of all pagan gods, Dionysus looked and behaved most like a human being for the longest periods of time and was *deus praesentissimus*.[69] Dionysus is *the* pagan parallel – perhaps *the* parallel full stop – for the Incarnation.

From all this, it is already clear that Luke is extremely creative in his response to *Bacchae*, and that he expects at least a proportion of his readerships/audiences to recognise a complex intertextual relationship.[70] This conclusion should not surprise: similar intertextuality marks his engagement with the Septuagint, or, among Classical authors, with Homer.[71] Hence, just as Classical texts are intensely 'imitative' in the sense of 'imitating' other Classical texts, so too is *Acts*.

Estimation of Luke's use of *Bacchae* and of Dionysiac material must also take account of *2* and *3 Maccabees*,[72] which treat attempts by the Seleucids and Ptolemies to impose paganism, particularly the worship of Dionysus, on the Jews, whether in Judaea or in Egypt.

In *2 Maccabees* 7.19 one of seven brothers being tortured to death warns Antiochus Epiphanes: 'As for you, do not think that you will be unpunished, having taken it in hand *to fight God*', and Antiochus is later described as 'breathing out fire, in his passions against the Jews' (9.7, cf. *Bacchae* 620 '[Pentheus] breathing out his passion'). As in *Acts*, *Bacchae* allusions in this strongly Hellenising text are persuasive,[73] and one 'god-fighter' is succeeded by another.[74] *3 Maccabees* contains even more such

---

[67] Cf. further p. 83 below.

[68] Cf. 2.22, 17.31.

[69] Henrichs (1982) 152; (1993); Tueller (1992) 14.

[70] *Contra* Alexander (2006), who remains sceptical of conscious *imitatio* of any of the poetic texts of the high literary culture.

[71] MacDonald (2003), with the judicious Lang (2004).

[72] Vögeli (1953) 426 n. 44; Pervo (1987) 7, 119-20; Dormeyer (2005) 155 n. 8. There are also links – not directly Dionysiac – between *Acts* and *1 Maccabees*: p. 96 below.

[73] Cf. Dormeyer-Galindo (2003) 95.

[74] Thus Nicanor: 14.32-33; 15.3, 32-3.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

material.[75] In both texts, the *Bacchae* and Dionysiac material underpin powerful religious and political narratives of bondage and liberation, and a Dionysiac assault upon Yaweh is defeated by Yaweh's deployment of Dionysiac methods.

Now, Luke's Dionysiac material sometimes echoes Maccabean Dionysiac material. For example, just as the theomach Antiochus Epiphanes 'breathes fire in his rages against the Jews', so the theomach Saul 'breathes threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord' (9.1). Similarly, eating by worms characterises the deaths both of the theomach Herod Agrippa I (12.23) and of the theomach Antiochus (*2 Maccabees* 9.9),[76] and the kings share the hybristic aspirations to divinity (cf. *2 Maccabees* 9.12) of which Pentheus also exhibits symptoms. Presumably, also, the use in *2* and *3 Maccabees* of *Bacchae* both as a myth providing the backbone of the historical narrative and as a repeating mythical pattern influenced Luke more broadly, though allowance should surely also be made for the myth-historical narratives of Herodotus.[77] Luke's literary exploitation of Dionysiac material far exceeds anything in *2* or *3 Maccabees*, but it is to some extent filtered through these texts and thus (again) involves a complex process of 'double allusion'. Luke's engagement with *2* and *3 Maccabees* also has still larger religious and political implications, of which more later.

I turn now to other questions illuminated by the Dionysiac parallels in *Acts*.

The status of Christianity vis-à-vis Judaism

Christianity[78] is existentially problematic, partly Jewish, partly other, partly old, partly new. These problematics greatly exercised the early Christians.[79] Within the general context of *Acts*, Luke cannot say outright that Christianity is in some ways a 'new religion', because that would concede the Jewish claim that Christianity is the *bastard* child of Judaism, misbegotten by

[75] Cousland (2001).
[76] Cf. also Dormeyer-Galindo (2003) 194.
[77] Cf. p. 76 above.
[78] *Acts* itself first attests 'Christians' (11.26; 26.28).
[79] Harrisville (1955); (1960); Löning (1998); Lieu (2002); (2004); Buell (2005).

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

the renegade Paul in unholy union with Gentiles.[80] So *Acts* contains much material designed to represent Christianity as the *fulfilment* of Judaism. This strand is protreptic for Jews within the historical narrative and, presumably, also protreptic for any Jewish readers/audience of *Acts*. The same applies to those elements, both in *Acts* and in *Luke*, which characterise Christianity in terms of *renewal*. As against this, the consistent narrative analogy in *Acts* between Jesus and Dionysus helps to *suggest* Jesus' 'newness', because, formally speaking, Dionysus is a 'new god'.[81] Moreover, Luke conveys this idea of 'newness' somewhat more explicitly, though still obliquely, in the Pentecost episode, with its allusion to 'sweet' wine and its links back to ambiguous claims to newness made by Jesus in the Gospel. As at least one of those examples shows – Jesus' celebration of the 'new wine' of his ministry – the implication of 'newness' may appeal even to Jews, but it has greater appeal to pagans, to whom Christianity *needs* to be presented as 'new', since they have already had much exposure to traditional Judaism. At the same time, even to pagans, it should not be presented as entirely new, otherwise it will lose much of its grounding. On this issue, early Christianity *has* to equivocate.

In *Acts* 17 Luke actually makes the idea of Jesus' newness explicit, but he focalises it through the Athenians, to whom Paul 'seems to be an announcer of strange deities' and who ask about 'this new teaching', even though Athens had a synagogue, only just mentioned in the text (17.17). As we have seen, the Athenians' comment recalls the accusation against Socrates and thus amusingly wrong-foots the contemporary Athenians, who are further teased for their traditional obsession with newness. Yet, as we have also seen, the precise epithet 'strange' evokes more particularly Dionysus in *Bacchae*, and the Athenians', as it were, 'interrogation' of Paul evokes alike the trial of Socrates *and* Pentheus' judicial proceedings against Dionysus *and* the various judicial proceedings taken against the various Dionysus-

[80] This might be called the 'Jewish' view of Christianity, e.g. Feldman (1996) 285; Vermes (2000/1) 63-4, 76, 80, 109-10.

[81] Similarly, Lang (2003) 8; Dormeyer (2005) 154-5, 163-4; Dionysus is 'new' when in myth he introduces his cult into cities (as in *Bacchae*), or when in ritual his arrival is celebrated as of a new god, even though the ritual is annual. Thus this 'newness' is necessarily ambiguous.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

substitutes – including Paul himself – in earlier episodes. Further, although the newness-obsessed Athenians look so different from allegedly tradition-loving Jews, the fact that the 'strangers' staying in Athens are also newness-obsessed helps to problematise the boundaries between Athenians and others, and between 'newness' or 'strangeness' and 'non-newness' or 'non-strangeness'.

Thus *Acts* 17 acts as a mirror for the narrative of *Acts* as a whole and as a space in which the ambiguous existential status of Christianity can be played out in a sanitised way but one that is relevant both to Jews and to Gentiles. Both parties can be enthused by the energy of this sort of new religious movement. The *ambiguity* of Dionysus' status – 'new' or not, 'stranger' or not – suits Luke's purpose perfectly. In this crucial matter of the existential status of Christianity, the *Bacchae*/Dionysus intertext works hard.

The relationship between Jesus-religion and Dionysus-religion

If in *Acts* 17 the parallel between Jesus and Dionysus offers a way of exploring the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, it is also an important topic in its own right. Paul (16) is represented as being 'provoked' by the fact that 'the city was full of idols'. This is a transparent narrative device to cast him in the familiar role of 'outside innocent visits corrupt city'[82] (for the historical Paul surely knew that Athens, of all Gentile cities, would be like this). Conventionally, this scenario combines light fun at the expense of the innocent newcomer with censure of the city, which the sophisticated reader is invited to view with new eyes. Here the first element is absent and Paul at once plays the sterner figure of the outsider as observer and judge (16, 22), even as Cynic 'scout'. His initial characterisation of the Athenians to their face – 'as being as fearful of divinities as it is possible to be in all respects' (22), cuts two ways:[83] both parrhestiastically critical (you dreadfully superstitious lot!) and implicitly protreptic (you are so religious that you are fertile ground for the acceptance of the true god). Paul's appeal to the

[82] Cf. e.g. Virg. *Ecl.* 1; Calp. Sic. *Ecl.* 7; D. Chr. 7.22-63; Liban. 26.6, 27.6.
[83] Similarly Klauck (2000) 81; Dormeyer-Galindo (2003) 266-7.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Athenians' own religious and philosophical traditions follows a recognised Jewish proselytising technique,[84] but again the *Bacchae* analogy plays a role. Clearly, in so far as Jesus is here, as earlier, being portrayed as like Dionysus, the latter is not being damned outright. Pagans are being led to the truth of the Jesus-god through the medium of the closest analogue to Jesus among their own gods. In this respect, too, Paul's performance in Athens functions as a sort of meta- or self-reflexive narrative for the whole narrative of *Acts*. There is a message here alike for potential pagan converts, led along the Dionysiac path to Jesus, for Christian proselytisers (this is the right way to approach pagans), and for the many Jews who compromised with paganism[85] (follow Jesus, not Dionysus). Earlier Stephen, who anticipates Paul in so many important ways, stressed how Moses had learned 'the whole wisdom of the Egyptians' (7.22). So there is a level on which Dionysus stands *also* for the *generality* of the pagan gods.

The end of *Acts* 17 even enacts the peaceful conquest of Dionysus religion, when Paul's named converts include 'the Dionysiac' and 'the heifer'. This allusion comes most appropriately in a sequence where there is stress on 'knowing' and 'not knowing'[86] and on bad and good divinities: 'recognition' of the true god is what this sequence is all about, and so followers of the bull god himself meekly come over to the right side. True, Luke lists Dionysios and Damaris as being among Paul's few converts on this occasion, but their coming over, like Paul's preaching in Rome at the end of *Acts* (shortly to be discussed), has proleptic force. The conversion of the Dionysiacs in general has not actually happened yet, but it will. And, indeed, in the fullness of historical time, it did.[87] Note also that climactic naming as a means of resolving implicit interpretative problems is a common trick in Classical literature, the best parallel here being the delayed dramatic appearance, in the Dionysiac novel *Daphnis and Chloe*, of a character named

[84] P. 93 and n. 129 below.

[85] P. 92 below.

[86] Note the similar stress in Peter's speech concerning Jesus in 2.14-36, where, similarly but more negatively, Dionysus is also the implicit comparator with Jesus (p. 75 above).

[87] There had already been individual converts: p. 94.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Dionysophanes: 'Dionysus made manifest'.[88] But, as immediately emerges, this climactic naming has another aspect.

Definition of Jesus

Acts 17 also contains significant puns. When Paul quotes Cleanthes and Aratus, 'we are his offspring' (28), the referent of 'his' is the 'unknown god' who has made heaven and earth. To a Jew this will be Yaweh, the God who, precisely, must not be named. To anyone who knows Cleanthes and Aratus, the implicit referent will be Zeus and the allusion to humans as his 'offspring' (γένος) will recall the epithet 'Zeus-born' (διογένης). Now, both in *Acts* and in *Luke*, the divinity of Jesus, son of a human mother, derives from his being 'the son of God' – in the strongest possible sense.[89] Similarly, *Dio*nysus, son of a human mother, is the son of Zeus, as his name signifies.[90] The appearance, at the end of the Athens sequence, of the name of *Dionysios*, therefore, clinches the process of definition: Dionysus, wrong son of wrong god: Jesus, right son of right God.[91]

Another pun signifies: Epicureans extolled the 'help' given to mortals by their 'divine' founder Epicurus, whose name means 'helper'.[92] But later, addressing Agrippa II (26.22), Paul invokes the '*help* that comes from God', the sole occurrence of ἐπικουρία in the New Testament. Thus the pagan 'helping' philosophers are helpless to help: help comes only from the Christian God. Similarly, the sign of the ship carrying Paul to Italy was the *Dios*curi (28.11), for pagans, 'sons of Zeus', as their name signifies, and divine 'saviours' and 'helpers',[93] the name Διοσκοῦροι being etymologically connected with ἐπικουρία,[94]

---

[88] Longus 4.13; Hunter (1983) 37-8.

[89] Explicitly at 9.20 and 13.33 (in both, Paul is the speaker), though many other passages are ambiguously relevant; *Luke* 1.32, 35; 10.22; 20.13-16; 22.29-30, 42, 70; discussion in (e.g.) Dunn (2003a) 708-24.

[90] The etymology (whether correct or not) is often clear, e.g. *Bacchae* 550-1.

[91] The combination of at least some historical distortion (n. 26), of the climactic naming and of the name's thematic density persuades me that 'Dionysios' and 'Damaris' are fictional.

[92] Cf. e.g. Frischer (1982) 275-6.

[93] Cf. e.g. Epict. 2.18.29.

[94] E.g. D.S. 6 fr. 6 Διόσκοροι .. πολλοῖς .. δεομένοις ἐπικουρίας βεβοηθηκέναι.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

yet, like Jesus, gods of ambiguous human parentage. Hence again the question: which g/God, which son of which G/god, which divine 'helper', which 'saviour'?[95] Not the Dioscuri, not Zeus himself, but – again – the Christian god/God. Note also that in *Acts* 17, as earlier and later, 'Jesus' is etymologised as 'Healer',[96] so in this respect too Jesus bests Dionysus *qua* healing god.[97]

So much for the religious implications of *Acts* 17.[98] But it is also appropriate to register an aesthetic judgement. *Acts* 17 is quite brilliantly conceived, and it is very Classical in its problematising of boundaries, both spatial and temporal, its use of mirror technique, its self-reflexivity, its obliquity of implication, its density of meaning, its clever punning, and its sheer overall poise. The next sequence, however, is even better.

The end of *Acts*

'He [Paul] remained [in Rome] for a period of two years in a private hired lodging,[99] and he received all who came in to him, heralding the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all freedom of speech and unhinderedly' (28.31).

Many scholars have found the end of *Acts* problematic, whether as being bathetic, pessimistic, evasive or lacunose. From Luke's point of view, such judgements reveal their authors to be defective Christians. From a Classical point of view, the end of *Acts* is a very great end, on a par even with the end of Herodotus or the end of the *Aeneid*.[100]

How, broadly, does the end 'work'? At the beginning of *Acts* (1.8), the risen Jesus, after himself telling of the kingdom of

---

[95] Thus at 28.11 the deceptive associations of παράσημος as adjective (Barrett (2004) 1227-8) are very nicely judged.

[96] 10.38; 4.22 ~ 4.18; 28.27 > 28.31; the association is (re-)activated in *Acts* 17, (a) because this is how 'the philosophers' will naturally take the name at 17.18; (b) because of the earlier allusion (17.5-9) to a character called 'Jason', the Greek equivalent of the Jewish-Greek 'Jesus' and a name that *means* 'healer'.

[97] E.g. S. *Ant.* 1144.

[98] There is also much to be said about the philosophical implications: Moles (2006).

[99] Translation: Hauser (1979) 153-7; Rapske (1994) 177-9.

[100] Good discussions in Hauser (1979); Omerzu (2001); and Hooker (2003) 58-66, but there is much more to be said.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

God to the Apostles, instructs them to bear witness to him in Jerusalem, all Judaea and Samaria and until the end of the earth. Paul, an Apostle since his conversion after the encounter with Jesus on the Road to Damascus,[101] is at the end of *Acts* telling of the kingdom of God and bearing witness to Jesus. So end and beginning link. Further, Rome itself can be focalised by Jews and Greeks as the end of the earth, or – better – mission to Rome, often conceived as the centre of the earth, *foreshadows* mission to the end of the earth.[102] 'He received *all* who came in to him' then becomes proleptic of that mission to all human beings.[103]

The question of reader knowledge, or of temporal frame, now becomes critical.

The inference that the end shows *Acts* to have been written before Paul's death[104] is untenable: that death is repeatedly foreshadowed within *Acts*,[105] and *Luke* alludes to the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70.[106] Thus readers/audience (ancient as well as modern) know that just beyond the end of the text Paul's current mild house arrest will itself end: he will stand trial and die a horrible death, albeit that

---

[101] Many claim that *Acts* does not represent Paul as an apostle, except at the allegedly anomalous 14.4 and 14.14: Haenchen (1971) 114; Wallace-Williams (1993) 33, 66; Dunn (1996) 118, 188, 190; Barrett (2004) 644, 671f., 1042; II.lxxxix. But Paul himself cites (13.47, cf. 26.23) the verse from Isaiah (49.6) underlying the risen Jesus' injunction at 1.8; he himself is now fulfilling that injunction; at 22.21 and 26.16-17 the risen Jesus applies the verbal form of 'apostle' to Paul; and at 23.11 he instructs Paul in words that echo 1.8. *Acts*' representation of Paul's apostleship parallels Paul's own; cf. Bruce (1951) 33, 405, 445; Brown (1999) 283 n. 8; Dormeyer and Galindo (2003) 31-2, 150, 179, 182, 287. Indeed, denial of Paul's apostleship misses a crucial invitation to all readers (p. 89 below).

[102] The two interpretations: useful survey in Hauser (1979) 206 ff.; the ideological geography of *1 Maccabees* is also relevant: p. 97 and n. 146 below.

[103] As elsewhere (bibliography in Hauser (1979) 160 n. 269; discussion: 160-5; Dunn (1996) 277 ff., 323 ff.), Paul's actions recall Jesus'(Hauser (1979) 157): 28.31 ~ *Luke* 9.11 'and he received them and talked to them concerning the kingdom of God'.

[104] Thus e.g. Bruce (1951) 10 ff.; Hemer (1990) 365-410.

[105] E.g. 9.16 [<1.3, >17.3]; 20.17-38 (with e.g. Haenchen (1971) 566; Wallace-Williams (1993) 111; Dunn (1996) 269 ff.; Brown (1999) 313; 21.4, 11-14; 23.3 (with e.g. Wallace-Williams (1993) 117; Dormeyer-Galindo (2003) 342; Barrett (2004) 1059); 26.31-2; 27.24.

[106] Though the historical Jesus perhaps predicted these things (Dunn (2003a) 631-2), *Luke* 19.41 ff. 'touches up' *Mark* 13.1-2 in the light of history: cf. e.g. Wallace-Williams (1993) 8; Dunn (1996) xi; Brown (1997) 273-4; Barrett (2004) II xliii, cxii ff.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

of a heroic witness or martyr.[107] For in Paul's case, Jesus' initial command (1.8) and Ananias' injunction, 'you will be a witness for him [the Just One] to all men of what you have seen and heard' (22.15), entail a crucial development of the concept of 'witness' – from 'witness' to 'martyr'. This development has already been illustrated by the example of Stephen, earlier described by Paul himself as 'Stephen the *martus*' (22.20).[108] The structural fulcrum between the beginning and end of *Acts* comes in Paul's valedictory speech to the Ephesian elders in *Acts* 20, with its unmistakable 'tragic foreshadowings'.[109] V. 24 runs: 'But I do not make my life of any account as valuable to myself provided that I may end my race and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to bear witness throughly to the good news of the grace of God'. Here Paul's 'race' is the commission he received from Jesus, and the beginning of the sentence and the notion of completion in 'bear witness throughly' clearly convey that Paul's 'race' will be coextensive with his life.

Now, since *Paul's* mission to Rome was cut short, it is up to readers/audience of *Acts* to take over the baton from Paul and in their turn assume Jesus' commission to mission to the ends of the earth – if, that is, they are willing to convert and themselves to become Apostles. The open-ended-ness of the end[110] creates the space for readers'/auditors' acceptance or rejection of Jesus and, if acceptance, for their further acceptance of Jesus' commission to mission. And if that space is, as it were, completely filled by eager missionaries or Apostles, the space between Rome and the ends of the earth will also eventually be elided.

Thus the narrative that the end challenges 'us' to construct – the ways in which *we* 'write' Christianity – is more important than the narrative of *Acts* itself. This explains why Luke describes

---

[107] Since the mainline Christian tradition of Paul's martyrdom is foreshadowed in *Acts* (n. 105), the possible complications of Euseb. *EH* 2.22, 25, the Pastoral Epistles, and *1 Clem.* 5.6-7 are interpretatively immaterial. The end of *Acts* also has many philosophical resonances: Moles (2006).

[108] For the explicit martyr sense, cf. *Rev.* 17.6.

[109] See n. 105 above.

[110] Cf. also Hauser (1979) 147; Dunn (1996) xv, 11, 278; Klauck (2000) 118; Omerzu (2001); Lang (2003) 10.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

(1.1) the *Gospel* as 'the *first* book':[111] if *Acts* is the *second* book, then the *third* 'book' – and all subsequent 'books' – is, or are, what *we* 'write'. Luke creates these implications by playing on the relationship between the book as space or journey, with a beginning and an end, and its theme as space or journey, with a beginning and an end that has yet to be reached. Again, this is a technique of Classical authors, especially historians, relevant to Luke, and especially among Luke's historian predecessors, of Herodotus and Livy (Herodotus surely being Luke's main model here).[112]

Now, how does this complex of endings and non-endings at the end of *Acts* involve *Bacchae* and Dionysus?

Readers/audience know that Paul will be killed and that the first Roman persecutions of Christians will begin shortly thereafter in Rome itself. Death; persecution; at the end of the narrative readers yet again face the Dionysiac choice: accept the new god and follow Paul's example, or persecute Paul and his fellow-Christians. The choice is for everybody, but since the final scene is set in Rome, it is particularly acute for a Roman audience.[113] But readers/audience also know that Paul's kingly persecutor Nero will die violently soon after: divine justice will overtake the new Pentheus.[114] Thus the *Bacchae* template helps to cover events beyond the narrative of *Acts* but past to first readers/audience. But such is the plasticity of myth that it can also cover events future to first readers/audience, the persecutions by Domitian, for example (if one puts *Acts* in the 80s), or by later Roman emperors. Nevertheless, the punishment of Nero, as of other *theomachs* within the narrative, serves to deter readers from choosing to become persecutors. They should

[111] On the problem see e.g. Barrett (2004) 65.

[112] Cf. Moles (1996) 275-7; (1993) 158-9; intriguingly, D. Chr. *Or.* 13 (date 101 CE) performs the same geographical, moral and, as it were, textual trajectory as *Acts* (Moles (2005) 126 n. 40); the parallel must mean something: exactly what, I am unsure. 'Write-your-life' challenges are posed by other genres besides historiography, notably philosophical protreptic (relevant to *Acts*, as to D. Chr. 13 or Horace's *Epistles*).

[113] Lang (2003) 10.

[114] And Luke brilliantly anticipates Nero's death *within* the narrative: the acclamation of Herod Agrippa I's voice as 'the voice of a god' (12.22) recalls Nero: Klauck (2000) 43-4; Dormeyer-Galindo (2003) 193; note the important parallel at D. Chr. 66.6, with Moles (1983) 133-4.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

instead follow Paul: but in full knowledge of what this may entail ('witness' in the form of 'martyrdom').

For here there is a decisive difference from *Bacchae*. Paul will not now be released. There will be no more prison-bursting Dionysiac epiphanies: instead, judicial murder. It is as if Luke is saying: bye-bye miraculous divine interventions, hello, harsh reality. This change of tone partly registers the threat posed to Christianity by Rome herself.[115] Still another function of Luke's use of *Bacchae*, then, is to suggest a sort of transition from *muthos* to *logos*, almost from mythical time to real time or from myth to reality: a transition of frequent concern to ancient historiography.[116]

Such a transition does not necessarily – and in Luke's case obviously does not – deny the broad truth status of the *muthos* material. But the *broad* truth. No reader cognisant of the Dionysiac parallels can take the narratives of Peter's and Paul's and Silas' escapes from prison or of Paul's conversion as literally true.[117]

The move, at the end of *Acts*, away from, as it were, the age of miracles to harsh reality, however, does not mean that all is unrelieved gloom, both in regard to the general implications that we have already seen, in regard even to the reality of persecution (for Paul himself had been a great persecutor and yet had been converted), and in regard to Paul's own end.

Paul is left preaching and teaching 'with all frankness and unhinderedly'. Commentators generally take *Acts*' emphatic last word in a legal sense, as referring to Paul's *relative* freedom under house arrest.[118] This seems to be supported by 24.23: '[Felix] giving orders to the centurion that he [Paul] should be kept in custody and that he should have some relief and that *none* of his personal friends *should be hindered* from attending to him'.

---

[115] Further p. 96 below.

[116] Marincola (1997) 117-27; of concern also to ancient philosophy (Moles (2006)).

[117] *Pace* many, e.g. Dunn (1996) xxi.

[118] Hauser (1979) 144-50; also Bruce (1951) 481; Dunn (1996) 356; Barrett (2004) 1253. The important Platonic parallel (*Cratylus* 415d)) brings further dimensions (Moles (2006)).

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

But this interpretation trivially privileges the immediate dramatic situation and ignores the inevitable sequel (Paul's death), which, as we have seen, is interpretatively central. The relationship between 28.31 and 24.23 is one of contrast. The legal sense is 'trumped' by 'unhinderedly' as a metaphorical or spiritual term. Doubtless, as *2 Timothy* 2.9 says – perhaps even glossing this passage – 'the word of God is not bound',[119] but the paradoxical redefinition of imprisonment and liberty must also apply to human beings who proclaim that Word. Thus the end of *Acts* crucially redefines both imprisonment and liberty in Christian spiritual terms, thus providing powerful reassurance to those who choose as Paul did.

To understand the full theological implications of Paul's death, we again have to feed material from the rest of *Acts* into the 'spaces' between first, Paul at the end of *Acts* (very much alive) and Paul as we know he soon will be (dead), and second, between Paul dead and Paul's final state. Final justice will be restored by the resurrection of bodies at the end of time. Again, the 'gap' at the end of *Acts* is filled by the beginning, with its developing stress on resurrection (1.3; 2.24, 31-2; 3.15, 22; 4.2).

Thus on another level, the harshly realistic, even, in a sense, non-divine end of *Acts*, necessarily involves its own deconstruction, its own reversal: from real time and harsh reality – trans*cended* by Christian faith – to the literal fulfilment of the Christian *muthos* at the end of time.

There are again decisive differences from Dionysus-religion. *Bacchae* ends with misery for all the main characters, Dionysus' savagery made manifest, as he punishes even his followers because they were slow to accept him. He is merciless and his justice is partial.[120] Unlike *Bacchae*, however, *Acts* is not, finally, a tragedy. In contrast to Dionysus, Jesus forgave Saul the persecutor and the whole trajectory of Saul-Paul and of Paul's heroic progress to Apostleship, to spiritual freedom, to martyrdom and to the general resurrection at the end of time illustrates both the perfect justice and the loving forgiveness of the one true God. That general resurrection at the end of time

[119] Hauser (1979) 147; Klauck (2000) 118.

[120] Seaford (1996) 37-9, 44-52, and 252-3 convincingly argues that the punishment is restricted to the ruling family and that Dionysus benefits the polis as a whole. My remarks apply to the main *dramatis personae*.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

itself decisively trumps Dionysus' promise of eternal life as made only to his initiates.

Acts, then, both enacts Jesus religion's peaceful appropriation of Dionysus and in the end demonstrates Dionysus' comprehensive inferiority. The latter purpose might seem *de trop*, since Luke obviously regards Christianity as true and Dionysus worship as false. But he is writing in a competitive religious market and needs to show that even the formal claims of Dionysus worship are inferior.

Larger religious and political contexts[121]

Jewish history and the geographical position of Palestine brought Jewish monotheism and pagan polytheism into constant contact, both within Palestine itself (and even within Judaea) and in the Diaspora. While the contact was generally hostile, there were complicating factors. Some Jewish religious symbols looked Dionysiac to non-Jews – some may well have been inspired by Dionysiac symbols[122] – and many Greeks and Romans[123] – and some Jews -[124] identified Yaweh with Dionysus. Pagan henotheism – which greatly benefited Dionysus[125] – could shade into practical monotheism. The 'Highest' God was widely, though not always, seen as Jewish.[126] Within Palestine some Greek cities honoured Dionysus and when Hellenistic kings sought to promote Dionysus among Jews they made converts. This is the background to *1-3 Maccabees*. [127] There were always Jews who compromised (in varying degrees) with paganism. [128]

---

[121] Herewith extreme generalisation and simplification; essential background: Hengel (1974); critical assessment: Millar (2006) 32-90.

[122] Alföldi (1973) 138, with bibliography; Goodenough (1992) 60-1, 75-7, 138-9, 141-3; 251 ff.

[123] Val. Max. 1.2 ext.3; Plu. *Quaest. Conv.* IV.6.1-2, 671c-672c; Tac. *Hist.* 5.5.5; Alföldi (1973) 137-8; Feldman (1996) 367-9; 540-6.

[124] Smith (1975) 821-4.

[125] Versnel (1990).

[126] Mitchell (1999). Hence the ambiguities of the incident with the prophetic slave girl (*Acts* 16.16 ff.).

[127] Discussion: Hengel (1974) I. 284-309; II.188 ff.; Schäfer (2003) 42-4; Hacham (2005); Johnson (2005); Millar (2006) 67-90.

[128] Hengel (1974) I.264; Barclay (1996) 130-2; Thiede (2004) 93-4.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Law-observant Jews could either condemn paganism absolutely, or, while denying the pagan gods, seek to channel the underlying religious feelings into worship of the one true god. Thus definition and right naming become essential. *Acts* 17 starts from this Jewish proselytising tradition,[129] and definition and right naming are everywhere important in *Acts*.[130]

Both for Jews and non-Jews, the religious question was necessarily also political, and tensions necessarily worsened under Gentile rulers who claimed to be divine, especially when they claimed to be 'New Dionysuses'. Hence the concerns of *2* and *3 Maccabees*. And, although the Dionysiac threat was particularly acute from Antiochus Epiphanes and Ptolemy Philopator, it was recurrent, because the role of 'new Dionysus' was claimed by many Gentile rulers, including – in the recent past – Mark Antony.[131]

The complexities of the relations between Yaweh and Dionysus increased with Jesus. In *Luke*, as in the other Gospels, parallels and contrasts are drawn between Jesus and Dionysus.[132] If the historical Jesus made divine claims for himself,[133] then, given the history of the relations between Yaweh, whom Jesus regarded as his father, and Dionysus, the *historical* Jesus *may* have drawn these parallels and contrasts, some of which seem to go back as early as Q.[134] They are certainly intrinsic to the Gospels' representation of Jesus' self-representation. From the Pentecost episode on, with its links back into *Luke*, *Acts* also recognises these ambiguous links between Jesus and Dionysus. The dramatic Paul also recognises them, because his third account of his conversion quotes *Bacchae*. How much the historical Paul knew about the historical Jesus is highly disputable, but unless Paul's account, in *First Corinthians*, of the institution of the Lord's Supper has no authority outside Paul

---

[129] Barrett (2004) 825.

[130] The phenomenon can of course be analysed in Classical as well as Jewish terms.

[131] Fox (1973/2004) 44-5, 508, 340-2, 339-400, 539-40; Rice (1983) 49-102, 189, 191-2; Cohen (1997) 158; Arr. *Ind.* 1.4-5; 5.12; Plu. *Ant.* 24; Sen. *Suas.* 1.6.

[132] Tueller (1992) *passim*; *John* 2.1-11; 15.1; Keener (2003) 495; p. 74 above.

[133] Discussion: Dunn (2003a) 718-24; Thiede (2004) 58-72 (decisive, I think).

[134] Hypothetical but (in my view) certain source of the 50s; note esp. *Luke* 7.32 with n. 37 above.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

himself,[135] Paul must have known of the connection between Jesus and Dionysus, because the Lord's Supper, if not based on Dionysiac cult, inevitably invites comparison with it,[136] just as '*I* am the true Vine' (*John* 15.1) *includes* dismissal of Dionysus.[137]

Jesus' death and alleged resurrection further increased the parallels between the two gods, parallels widely recognised in the ancient world, both by pagans and by Christians.[138] The process began early. *First Corinthians* (in the 50s) runs a series of analogies between the Christian 'mystery' and pagan mysteries, especially Dionysus'.[139] Why? Negatively, Christianity has no choice but to acknowledge the parallels with Dionysus: they are so obvious that they have to be coped with. Positively, Paul clarifies the Christian mystery by comparison and contrast with its nearest pagan equivalent and thereby shows Christianity's superiority. One passage even implies that some of his addressees had come to Christianity through Dionysiac cult, as did later Christians such as Tatian.[140]

All these things in *First Corinthians* are also found in *Acts*. If Luke was Paul's companion,[141] was the *historical Paul* one of Luke's inspirations for his Dionysicised Jesus? Did Paul actually quote *Bacchae* before Agrippa II and Berenice? Festus' reaction in 26.24 – 'Paul, you're mad. Your many-lettered-ness[142] is

---

[135] The 'Jewish view' of *1 Cor.* 11.23: Maccoby (1991); Vermes (2000/1) 73-4.

[136] Cf. p. 74 above; the huge controversy whether there was actual Dionysiac influence is immaterial here.

[137] Smith (1975) 818.

[138] E.g. Orig. *Contra Cels.* 1.9, 2.34, 3.16, 4.10, 8.41 f., 8.48; *Protrept.* 12; Just. Mart. *Ap.* 1.21.2; 54.6; *Dial.* 69.2; Clem. Alex. *Protr.* 2.19.3, 2.22.4; the *Christus Patiens*; Burkert (1987) 3; 134 n. 11. Dionysus is shockingly absent from Wright (2003) and Hurtado (2005).

[139] Controversial but (in my view) certain (though several readers have warned me off these contentious areas). Cf. e.g. 2.6-7 with Héring (1949) 25; 10.14-22 with Collins (1999) 376; 12.2 with Dunn (2004) 298; 13.12 with Seaford (1984) (important).

[140] 12.2; Tati. *Or. ad Graec.* 29, with Sanders (2000) 113-14.

[141] Still plausible: Bruce (1951) 2-3; Hemer (1990) 309-64; Dunn (1996) x, 118; Brown (1997) 267 ff., 322-7.

[142] Interpretation: Bruce (1951) 448; Barrett (2004) 1167. Contrastingly, Peter and John are perceived by the high priest and Sadducees as ajgravmmatoi (4.13). The point, presumably, is a 'both-and' one: the first Christian leaders embrace the 'unlettered' and the 'lettered'; while Christianity does not *need* great learning, it can hold its own in that world (cf. Klauck (2000) 94-5 on *Acts* 17); and the same is true of *Acts* itself. Luke deflects accusations (both pagan and Jewish) of Christian 'uneducatedness'.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

turning you to madness' – seems to express exasperation at a virtuosic multicultural display. This seems to be a serious component of Luke's representation of Paul. Paul's knowledge of *Bacchae* can surely be assumed.[143]

Perhaps, then, in, so to speak, an international context, it was Paul who first mythologised his encounter with the risen Jesus as a Dionysiac event. Coming as it does three times, this encounter is the key conversion encounter with Jesus in *Acts*. The preoccupation of *Acts*, then, with Dionysus would have a double pedagogical significance. Not only would *Acts* emerge as a Christian teaching text which appropriated Dionysus to the new Jesus religion; it would also itself attest one of the ways – and a very important way – in which Paul and his companions actually did 'sell' Jesus: as the new Dionysus, whose virtues nevertheless eclipsed Dionysus's in every possible respect.

Such Pauline influence, however, would explain only a fraction of the immense riches of Luke's exploitation of Dionysiac material. Besides all the others discussed, there remains *Acts*' relationship – even dialectic – with *1-3 Maccabees*.

In *2* and *3 Maccabees* the Dionysicised Yaweh brings religious and political liberation from deranged Syrian and Egyptian kings who try to impose Dionysus upon the Jews. Nevertheless, *3 Maccabees* advocates generic political loyalty to 'the kings'.[144] Now, many scholars see *Acts* as offering a broadly favourable portrayal of Roman power. Granted that Roman justice is better than Jewish lynch mobs and that there are 'good Romans', this general emphasis is hardly right.[145] In any case, there was bound to be a greater incompatibility between Christians and their Roman rulers than between Jews and their Syrian and Egyptian kings (and their Roman successors). Not only had Gentile rulers had plenty of time to reach broad accommodations with the Jews, unlike the Romans with the new Christian movement, but Christianity was a far more actively proselytising religion than Judaism and it was committed to proselytising throughout the Empire. Between Rome, with its kings (as the emperors were generally viewed),

[143] Thiede (2004) 13-32.

[144] *3 Macc.* 3.3-7; further Johnson (2005).

[145] Useful correctives in Jervell (1996) 100-6; Brown (1999) 271; Klauck (2000) 43-4; and the essays in Labahn-Zangenberg (2002).

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

polytheism, ruler-cult and claims to an empire extending to the ends of the earth, and monotheistic Christianity, which aimed to extend 'the servant Kingdom' to the ends of the earth, there was a real conflict of power and of different kinds of power. Here again Luke seems to be developing a Maccabean motif, for *1 Maccabees* makes play with the theme of 'the end(s) of the earth', as a marker both of imperial power and of religious power and in relation to different 'centres' (Alexander, Judaea, Rome).[146] Luke's conceptualisation of the new religion – or new form of religion, in both its religious and its political aspects – is thus far more complex than anything in *2* and *3 Maccabees*. Since *Acts* applies the process of Dionysification to Jesus rather than to Yaweh, Christianity emerges *both* as a freedom movement *and* as – in some sense – an imperialist movement, and these two things both *within* Judaism, *between* Christians and Gentiles and *among* Gentiles. Luke fully apprehended the Dionysiac transgressiveness so emphasised by modern scholarship, and he appropriated it to the utmost: to the ends of the earth, in fact.[147]

Dionysius the Areopagite, pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, St Denis, Denis, Denise, Denis the Menace, for Classicists, Denis Feeney ... *Acts* 17.34 is the single door by which all these names and personages come into the Christian, or post-Christian, world. But their very existence is due to an error in literary criticism.[148] Dionysius the Areopagite is an Orthodox saint, and on his feast-day of October 3rd Greek women decorate his icons with vine leaves. They think they know who he really is. They are right to be suspicious of Dionysius' identity and right also to intuit that the *Acts of the Apostles* is deeply permeated with the Dionysiac. The theology, however, is a little simple.

JOHN MOLES
Newcastle University

[146] 1.1-3, 3.9, 8.4, cf. 2.9.17.

[147] Dionysus is one of the greatest 'international traveller' gods: cf. *Bacchae* 13-22 and the myth of Dionysus in India (quintessentially, an 'end of the earth').

[148] P. 85 and n. 91 above.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Bibliography

Adams, E. and Horrell, D.G., eds. (2004) *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church*. Louisville/London.

Alexander, L. (2006) 'New Testament Narrative and Ancient Epic', in id. *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context: A Classicist Looks at the Acts of the Apostles*, 165-82. London.

Alföldi, A. (1973) '*Redeunt Saturnia regna*, II: An iconographical pattern', *Chiron* 3: 131-42.

Bakker, E.J., de Jong, I.J.F., and van Wees, H., eds. (2002) *Brill's Companion to Herodotus*. Leiden.

Barclay, J.M.G. (1996) *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan* (323 BCE-117CE). Edinburgh.

Barrett, C.K. (2004) *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Acts of the Apostles, Volumes I and II*. London/New York.

Boedeker, D. (2002) 'Epic Heritage and Mythical Patterns in Herodotus', in Bakker, de Jong and van Wees (2002), 97-116.

Bockmuehl, N. and Hagner, D.A., eds. (2005) *The Written Gospel*. Cambridge.

Brant, J.-A., Hedrick, C.W., and Shea, C., eds. (2005) *Ancient Fiction: The Matrix of Early Christian and Jewish Narrative*. Leiden.

Brenk, F.J. (1994) 'Greek Epiphanies and Paul on the Road to Damascus', in U. Bianchi, ed. *The Notion of "Religion" in Comparative Research*, 415-24. Rome.

Brown, R.E. (1999) *An Introduction to the New Testament*. New York/London/Toronto/Sydney/Auckland.

Bruce, F.F. (1951) *The Acts of the Apostles*. London.

Buell, D.K. (2005) *Why this New Race?: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity*. New York.

Burkert, W. (1987) *Ancient Mystery Cults*. Cambridge, MA, and London.

Carpenter, T.H. and Faraone, C.A., eds. (1993) *Masks of Dionysus*. Ithaca/London.

Cohen, A. (1997) *The Alexander Mosaic: Stories of Victory and Defeat*. Cambridge.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Colaclides, P. (1973) '*Acts* 17, 28a and *Bacchae* 506', *Vigiliae Christianae* 27: 161-4.
Collins, R.F. (1999) *First Corinthians*. Collegeville, Minnesota.
Conzelmann, H. (2nd ed. 1972) *Die Apostelgeschichte*. Tübingen.
Cousland, J.R.C. (2001) 'Dionysus theomachos? Echoes of the *Bacchae* in 3 Maccabees', *Biblica* 82: 539-48.
Dibelius, M. (1956) *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*. New York.
Dodds, E.R. (1960) *Euripides: Bacchae*. Oxford.
Dormeyer, D. (2005) 'Bakchos in der Apostelgeschichte', in Haehling (2005), 153-72.
Dormeyer, D. and Galindo, G. (2003) *Die Apostelgeschichte. Ein Kommentar für die Praxis*. Stuttgart.
Dunn, J.D.G. (1996) *The Acts of the Apostles*. Peterborough.
—— (2003a) *Jesus Remembered*. Grand Rapids/Cambridge.
—— (2003b), ed., *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul*. Cambridge.
—— (2004), 'Reconstructions of Corinthian Christianity and the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians', in Adams and Horrell (2004), 295-310
Feldman, L.H. (1996) *Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*. Leiden/New York/Köln.
Fiebig, P. (1926) 'Zu den Wundern der Apostelgeschichte', *Angelos* 2: 157-8.
Fitzmyer, J.A. (1998) *The Acts of the Apostles. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York/London/Toronto/Sydney/Auckland.
Fox, R. Lane (1973/2004), *Alexander the Great*. London.
Frankemölle, H. ed. (1998) *Der ungekündigte Bund? Antworten des Neuen Testaments*. Freiburg.
Freyne, S. (2000), *Galilee and Gospel, Selected Essays*. Tübingen.
—— (2004), *Jesus, a Jewish Galilean: a New Reading of the Jesus-Story*. London/New York.
Frischer, B. (1982) *The Sculpted Word: Epicureanism and Philosophical Recruitment in Ancient Greece*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London.
Funke, H. (1967) 'Art. Euripides', *JAC* 8/9: 233-79.
Gill, D.W.G. and Gempf, C., eds. (1994) *The Book of Acts in its Graeco-Roman Setting*. Grand Rapids.
Goodenough, E.R. (1992) *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, edited and abridged by J. Neusner. Princeton.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Haacker, K. (2003) 'Paul's Life' in Dunn (2003b), 19-33.
Hacham, N. (2005) '3 Maccabees: An Anti-Dionysiac Polemic' in Brant, Hedrick, and Shea (2005), 167-83.
Hackett, J. (1956), 'Echoes of Euripides in the *Acts* of the Apostles?', *Irish Theological Quarterly* 23: 218-27; 350-66.
Haehling, R. von, ed. (2005) *Griechische Mythologie und frühes Christentum*. Darmstadt.
Haenchen, E. (1971) *The Acts of the Apostles*. Oxford.
Harrisville, R.A. (1955) 'The Concept of Newness in the New Testament', *JBL* 74: 117-39
—— (1960) *The Concept of Newness in the New Testament*. Minneapolis.
Hauser, H.J. (1979) *Strukturen der Abschlusserzählung der Apostelgeschichte (Apg 28,16-31)*. Rome.
Heever, G. van der (2005) 'Novel and Mystery: Discourse, Myth and Society' in Brant, Hedrick, and Shea (2005), 89-114.
Hemer, C.J. (1990) *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*. Winona Lake, Indiana.
Hengel, M. (1974) *Judaism and Hellenism* 2 vols. London.
Henrichs, A. (1982) 'Changing Dionysiac Identities', in B.F. Meyer and E.P. Sanders, eds. *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition Volume Three: Self-Definition in the Graeco-Roman World*, 137-60. London.
—— (1993) '"He has a God in Him": Human and Divine in the Modern Perception of Dionysus' in Carpenter and Faraone (1993), 13-43.
Héring, J. (1949) *La Première Épitre De Saint Paul Aux Corinthiens*. Neuchatel/Paris.
Hintermaier, J. (2003) *Die Befreiungswunder in der Apostelgeschichte. Motiv- und formkritische Aspekte sowie literarische Funktion der wunderbaren Befreiungen in Apg 5,17-42.12.1-23.16,11-40*. Berlin/Vienna 2003.
Hooker, M.D. (2003) *Endings: Invitations to Discipleship*. London.
Hunter, R.L. (1983) *A Study of* Daphnis & Chloe. Cambridge.
Hurtado, L.W. (2005) *How on Earth did Jesus become a God?: Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus*. Grand Rapids.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Jervell, J. (1996) *The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles.* Cambridge.
Johnson, S. (2005) 'Third Maccabees: Historical Fictions and the Shaping of Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Period' in Brant, Hedrick, and Shea (2005), 185-97.
Johnson, L.T. (1992) *The Acts of the Apostles.* Collegeville, Minnesota.
Keener, C.S. (2003) *The Gospel of John: a Commentary.* Peabody, Mass.
Klauck, H.-J. (2000) *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity: the World of the Acts of the Apostles.* Edinburgh.
Labahn, M. and Zangenberg, J., eds. (2002) *Zwischen den Reichen: Neues Testament und Römische Herrschaft.* Tübingen/Basel.
Lang, M. (2003) 'How a Roman can read Luke-Acts', unpublished paper given at the 58th SNTS-Meeting (Bonn).
—— (2004), review of Macdonald (2003), *BMCR* 2004.08.13
Lieu, J.M. (2002) *Neither Jew nor Greek? Constructing Early Christianity.* London.
—— (2004) *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World.* London.
Löning, K. 'Eschatologische Krise und (Neuer) Bund. Zum Stellenwert des Bundes-Motivs im Zusammenhang neutestamentlicher Soteriologien' in Frankemölle (1998), 78-116.
Lüdemann, G. (1989) *Early Christianity according to the Traditions in Acts* Minneapolis.
Macdonald, D.R. (2003), *Does the New Testament Imitate Homer? Four Cases from the Acts of the Apostles.* New Haven.
Maccoby, H. (1991) 'Paul and the Eucharist', *NTS* 37: 247-67
Marincola, J. (1997) *Tradition and Authority in Ancient Historiography.* Cambridge.
Millar, F. (2006) *The Greek World, the Jews, and the East.* Chapel Hill.
Mitchell, S. (1999) 'The Cult of Theos Hypsistos between Pagans, Jews, and Christians' in Athanassiadi, P. and Frede, M., eds. *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* 81-148. Oxford.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Moles, J. (1983) 'Dio Chrysostom: exile, Tarsus, Nero and Domitian', *LCM* 8.9: 130-4.
—— (1993) 'Livy's Preface' *PCPS* 39: 141-68.
—— (1996) 'Herodotus warns the Athenians', *LILS* 9: 259-84.
—— (2002) 'Poetry, Philosophy, Politics and Play: *Epistles* I' in T. Woodman and D. Feeney, eds. *Traditions and Contexts in the Poetry of Horace* 141-57; 235-37 (Cambridge).
—— (2005) 'The Thirteenth Oration of Dio Chrysostom: Complexity and Simplicity, Rhetoric and Moralism, Literature and Life', *JHS* 125: 112-38.
—— (2006) 'Pagan Philosophy in the *Acts of the Apostles*', unpublished paper delivered at the Celtic Classics Conference, Lampeter, 30th August.
Nestle, W. (1900) 'Anklage an Euripides in der Apostelgeschichte', *Philol.* 13: 46-57.
Omerzu, H. (2001) 'Das Schweigen des Lukas. Ueberlungen zum offende Ende der Apostelgeschichte' in Horn, F.W. (ed.) *Das Ende des Paulus. Historische, theologische und literaturgeschichte Aspekte* 127-56. New York.
Pervo, R.I. (1987) *Profit with Delight: the Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles*. Philadelphia.
Rapske, B.M. (1994) *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody*. Grand Rapids.
Rice, E.E. (1983) *The Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus*. Oxford.
Rudberg, G. (1926) 'Zu den Bacchen des Euripides', *SO* 4: 29-34.
Rutherford, R.B. (1982) 'Tragic Form and Feeling in the *Iliad*', *JHS* 102: 145-60.
Saïd, S. (2002) 'Herodotus and Tragedy', in Bakker, E.J., de Jong, I.J.F., and van Wees, H. (2002) 117-148.
Sanders, J.T. (2000), *Charisma, Converts, Competitors: Societal and Sociological Factors in the Success of Early Christianity*. London.
Schäfer, P. (2003) *The History of the Jews in the Greco-Roman World*. London/New York.
Seaford, R. (1984), 'Through a Glass Darkly', *JTS* 35: 117-20.
—— (1996), *Euripides: Bacchae*. Warminster.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

—— (1997), 'Thunder, Lightning and Earthquake in the *Bacchae* and The *Acts* of the Apostles', in A.B. Lloyd, ed. *What is a God? Studies in the Nature of Greek Divinity* 139-51. London.

—— (2006) *Dionysos*. London.

Smend, F. (1925) 'Untersuchungen zu den Acta-Darstellungen von der Bekerung des Paulus', *Angelos* 1: 34-45

Smith, M. (1975) 'On the Wine God in Palestine', *Salo Wittmayer Baron Jubilee Volume* 815-29. Jerusalem.

Thiede, C.P. (2004), *The Cosmopolitan World of Jesus*. London.

Tschiedel, H.J. (1975) 'Ein Pfingstwunder im Apollonhymnus (Hymn. Hom. Ap. 156-64 und Apg 2,1-13)', *ZRG* 27: 22-40.

Tueller, M. (1992) 'Literary Representations of the New God: Jesus and Dionysus', BA thesis, Harvard. Cambridge, Mass.

Vermes, G. (2000/1) *The Changing Faces of Jesus*. London/New York.

Versnel, H.S. (1990) *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion, Vol. 1 Ter Unus*. Leiden.

Voegeli, A. (1953), 'Lukas und Euripides', *Theolog. Zeit*. 9: 415-38.

Wallace, R. and Williams, W. (1993) *The Acts of the Apostles: A Companion*. London.

Weaver, J.B. (2004) *Plots of Epiphany: Prison-Escape in the Acts of the Apostles* Berlin.

Weinreich, O. (1929), 'Gebet und Wunder', in *Genethliakon Wilhelm Schmid* 169-452, esp. 309-41. Stuttgart.

Windisch, H. (1932) 'Die Christophanien v. Damaskus (Acta 9.22 u. 26) u. ihre religionsgesch. Parallelen', *ZNW* 31: 1-23.

Wright, N.T. (2003), *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. London.

This content downloaded from
63.233.192.60 on Wed, 31 Aug 2022 20:16:38 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms